

Message Text

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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA, THE AFAR AND TFAI

REF: (A) ADDIS 6193; (B) ADDIS 5990; (C) ADDIS 5927

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SUMMARY. PMAC CHAIRMAN BG TEFERI BANTI TOLD THE OUTGOING FRENCH AMBASSADOR MZHWO THAT THE DIRG/EPMG IS NOW DETERMINED TO BRING THE AFAR TO HEEL. THIS MESSAGE ADDRESSES THE REASON WHY; REPORTS WHAT WE KNOW OF CURRENT PERTINENT FRANCO-ETHIOPIAN UNDERSTANDINGS; CONSIDERS THE LATEST DJIBOUTI RIOTS IN THEIR INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT AS WE SEE IT FROM HERE; LISTS NEW INTEREST-FACTORS WHICH THE PLAYERS MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT IN DEALING WITH THE TFAI-NEXUS OF PROBLEMS; AND CONCLUDES THAT THE USG SHOULD BEGIN TO STUDY THE POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS OF ANY EVOLUTION OF THE STATUS QUO. END SUMMARY.

THE FOLLOWING PERFORCE SOMEWHAT SPECULATIVE VIEWS ARE BASED ON THE INFORMATION CURRENTLY AVAILABLE TO US HERE. THEY ARE OFFERED IN CONFIDENTIAL

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THE LIGHT OF CURRENT AND ANTICIPATED EVENTS WHICH PROMISE TO PUT

NEW PRESSURE ON THE STATUS QUO IN AND AROUND THE FRENCH TERRITORY
OF AFARS AND ISSAS (TFAI).

1. THE PMAC AND THE AFAR - WHY DID ETHIOPIA'S PMAC, WITH ITS MANY PRESSING PROBLEMS, DECIDE NOW ALSO TO GO AFTER THE AFAR SULTAN, ALI MIRAH HANFERE? WE THINK THAT ALI MIRAH, OBSERVING DIRG TACTICS VIS-A-VIS THE TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIPS IN TIGRE AND KAFFA, CONSIDERED HIS TURN WAS BOUND TO COME. HE SET OUT TO STRENGTHEN HIS BARGAINING POSITION AND PLAYED FOR TIME WHILE ACQUIRING ARMS. HE KEPT THE ERITREAN INSURGENTS AT ARM'S LENGTH- AND THE KEY ETHIOPIAN ACCESS ROUTES TO ASSAB AND DJIBOUTI OPEN - TO AVOID PROVOCATIONS BUT GOT OUT HIS LINES TO POTENTIAL TFAI (AFAR), ERITREAN AND ARAB SUPPORTERS. HIS INTENT WAS TO DETER AND, IF NEED BE, TO IMPROVE HIS CAPACITY TO DEFEND HIMSELF. TO THE DIRG, HOWEVER, HE LOOKED INCREASINGLY THREATENING ATHWART ETHIOPIA'S LIFELINES AS HE ARMED AND LINED UP SUPPORT. PMAC LIKELY DECIDED IT HAD NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO DEAL WITH HIM SOONER RATHER THAN LATER. WHEN HE REFUSED REPEATED DIRG SUMMONS TO COME TO ADDIS, THE DIRG DETERMINED TO ATTACK THE FOUNDATIONS OF HIS INFLUENCE BY PUTTING HIS REVENUES, PRESTIGUE AND FOLLOWERS AT RISK. HE COULD NOT REFUSE TO RECEIVE A PMAC DELEGATION. HE COULD NOT PREVENT PMAC AGENTS FROM INDUCING THE NOMADS TO DRIVE THEIR FLOCKS INTO HIS FOLLOWERS (NATIONALIZED) PLANTATIONS. HE COULD NOT CHALLENGE THE ETHIOPIAN REGULARS DEPLOYED TOWARDS ASSAB, GOWANI AND TENDAHO. HE NEGOTIATED. ON MAY 27 HE HAD PMAC BELIEVING HE WOULD COME TO ADDIS AFTER ALL, ONLY TO MUSTER - THE FRENCH TELL US - A CROWD OF PEOPLE ENTREATING HIM NOT TO GO WHEN IT CAME TIME TO BOARD THE SMALL AIRCRAFT SENT BY THE DIRG. HE STAYED. THE DIRG, AS TEFERI BANTI CLEARLY INDICATED, WILL KEEP AFTER HIM.

2. THE FRENCH AND THE AFAR - FRANCE GOVERNS TFAI THROUGH ALI AREF BOURHAN, VASSAL OF ALI MIRAH. ALI MIRAH'S SUPPORT TO ALI AREF - AND PARIS - HAS BEEN USEFUL TO FRANCE, BUT SEEMS DISPENSABLE. ETHIOPIA'S GOOD WILL IS NOT. WITHOUT IT, THE FRENCH POSITION IN TFAI IS HEAVILY MORTGAGED AS ARE SUNDRY FRENCH COMMERCIAL INTERESTS HERE. FORCED TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THE ONE AND THE OTHER, WE THINK FRANCE WOULD OPT FOR ETHIOPIA. WATCHING THE EARLY MOVES, FRANCE THEREFORE WARNED ETHIOPIA NOT TO CREATE A SITUATION ADVERSE TO THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP, E.G. A CONFLICT ON THE CONFIDENTIAL

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FRONTIERS OF TFAI WHICH COULD LEAD TO BORDER VIOLATIONS TO WHICH FRANCE COULD HAVE TO REACT. THE DIRG RESPONDED WITH ASSURANCES. THIS MUCH WE KNOW. WE HAVE GOOD REASON TO BELIEVE THAT IN THIS CONTEXT IT WAS ALSO MADE CLEAR THAT ETHIOPIA GOODWILL DEPENDED ON FRENCH NEUTRALITY: NO MILITARY SUPPORT DIRECT OR INDICRCT FOR ALI MIRAH'S AFAR IN ETHIOPIA; NO SANCTUARY TO WHICH HIS MEN MIGHT WITHDRAW TO REGROUP AND FROM WHICH THEY MIGHT RAID INTO THE EMPIRE. THIS WAS, WE THINK, AGREED. THE FRENCH DEPLOYED TO INTERN AND

DISARM ANY ELEMENTS THAT MIGHT CROSS THE TFAI BORDER. THEY ARE STILL SO DEPLOYED. ALTHOUGH PMAC HAS ASKED THE GOF TO SEAL TFAI'S BORDERS, VIZ. TO TURN BACK ANY ELEMENTS ATTEMPTING TO FLEE INTO FRENCH TERRITORY, WE THINK THEY WOULD OFFER ALI MIRAH (AND HIS KEY MEN) POLITICAL ASYLUM SHOULD HE REQUEST IT, BUT WOULD NOT PERMIT HIM TO REMAIN POLITICALLY ACTIVE IF HE CAME OVER. WE THINK THIS IS WELL UNDERSTOOD IN ADDIS.

3. THE CURRENT DJIBOUTI RIOTS - OFFICIALLY, THESE RIOTS, WHICH HAVE CONTINUED INTERMITTENTLY FOR DAYS, ARE APOLITICAL ETHNIC (AFAR/ISSA) CLASHES SPARKED BY BANAL DISPUTES OVER CATTLE AND WOMEN. IN FACT, ALTHOUGH CATTLE AND WOMEN MAY HAVE SERVED AS CATALYSTS, ROWS OF THAT SORT DO NOT NORMALLY DRAG ON FOR DAYS KILLING 16 AND WOUNDING IN EXCESS OF 200 (FRENCH EMBASSY ADDIS FIGURES AS OF MAY 30) IN A SINGLE SMALL AFAR QUARTIER IN DJIBOUTI TOWN UNDER THE EYES OF STRONG FRENCH FORCES. (DEMONSTRATIONS WERE CONTINUING JUNE 1 WITH MASSIVE SEARCHES AND EXPULSIONS.) ACCORDINGLY, WE FEEL REASONABLY SURE THAT THESE INCIDENTS HAVE BEEN DELIBERATELY EXACERBATED AT FOREIGN POLITICAL INSTIGATION. THE RABAT AFRICAN LIBERATION COMMITTEE IS ABOUT TO CONVENE; THE MOGADISCIO ARAB LEAGUE CONFERENCE SHOULD FOLLOW AND THE OAU KAMPALA CM AND SUMMIT IS IN ACTIVE PREPARATION. IN THE BACKGROUND, MOREOVER, ARE RECENT OAU DECISIONS TO INCREASE LIBERATION EFFORTS IN TFAI, THE RIVALRY OF ETHIOPIA AND SOMALIA - EACH FOR ITS OWN REASONS - OVER THE HOSTING OF DJIBOUTI LIBERATION MOVEMENTS AND SUBSEQUENT SOMALI ACTIVISM AS EXPRESSED IN THE GUEURY KIDNAPPING. IN SHORT, RIOTS IN DJIBOUTI SEEM SUSPICIOUSLY TIMELY AND OPPORTUNE.

4. OTHER FACTORS - WE HAVE NO DOUBT THAT FRENCH MILITARY RESOURCES IN TFAI ARE SUFFICIENT TO DEAL WITH ANY LIKELY DISORDERS AND WE DEFER TO EMBASSY PARIS FOR ASSESSMENTS OF THEIR IMPACT UPON THE GOF'S POLITICAL WILL BE PRESERVE THE STATUS QUO. WE WOULD POINT OUT HOWEVER THAT THE PLAYERS IN THIS ROUND OF AN OLD GAME ARE CONFIDENTIAL

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CHANGING AS ARE THE HANDS THEY MUST PLAY AND THE STAKES. MOREOVER, THE PRESSURES SEEM LIKELY TO PRESIST IN THE COMING WEEKS OR MONTHS AND MAY GO HIGHER. SUEZ IS ABOUT TO REOPEN. SOVIET INTERESTS INTER ALIA IN NEIGHBORING SOMALIA HAVE GROWN. ALI MIRAH'S OPTIONS ARE SHRINKING. HIS DIFFICULTIES PLACE BEFORE ALI AREF AND POSSIBLY PARIS DECISION-MAKERS MORE COMPLEX CHOICES. PMAC SEEMS BOUND TO REACT TO PERCEIVED SOMALI CHALLENGES IN TFAI WITH GREATER VIGOR AND RUTHLESSNESS THAN THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT WOULD HAVE. A FALSE STEP BY THE DIRG, A DESPERATE DECISION TO FIGHT BY A CORNERED AFAR LEADERSHIP, COULD FACE ADDIS WITH SIGNIFICANT NEW DANGERS.

5. OUTLOOK - PERHAPS CURRENT PRESSURES WILL SUBSIDE QUICKLY. AT THE MOMENT THIS SEEMS SOMEWHAT UNLIKELY. IF THEY PRESIST, FRANCE MAY AT SOME POINT BE FORCED TO REVIEW ITS ALTERNATIVES. CONSTRUCTIVE

ALTERNATIVES ARE HARD TO DISCERN FROM THIS VANTAGE POINT. US INTERESTS STILL SEEM BEST SERVED IF FRANCE REMAINS. YET, THE POLITICAL STATUS QUO IN TFAI BECOMES MORE ANACHRONISTIC WITH EACH NEW DECOLONIZATION, AND INDEPENDENCE WILL CONTINUE TO BE DEMANDED BY OAU AFRICA, QUITE LIKELY SUPPORTED BY SEVERAL ARAB STATES. AN ETHIO-SOMALI CONDOMINIUM SEEMS EXCLUDED AT PRESENT. TFAI INDEPENDENCE WOULD HAVE TO BE GUARANTEED. AN OAU GUARANTEE CURRENTLY SEEMS UNLIKELY TO BE FEASIBLE WHILE ETHIOPIA AND SOMALIA PRESS THEIR CLAIMS. A FRENCH GUARANTEE MIGHT BE PERCEIVED AS FALSE DECOLONIZATION AND WOULD NOT BE ACCEPTABLE IN PARIS WITHOUT ASSURANCES (UNLIKELY TO BE GIVEN) BY ETHIOPIA AND SOMALIA. FOR THE TIME BEING WE MUST LEAVE THE PROBLEM TO THE PRINCIPALS. BUT IT SEEMS TIMELY TO START THINKING ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS FOR US OF A POSSIBLE EVOLUTION IN THE STATUS QUO.

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